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TAXES:

WHO PAYS,
WHAT FOR?

A circular library stamp from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The text "LIBRARY" is at the top, "RECEIVED" is in the middle, and "MAR 1 1947" is the date. A five-pointed star is on the left. The words "U. S. DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE" are at the bottom. A diagonal watermark reading "CONFIDENTIAL" is superimposed over the stamp.

ALL SEATS	EST. PRICE	50¢
	Govt. Tax	5¢
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TOTAL		55¢
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TOTAL 16¢

Hours	Rate
2	.32
3	.48
4	.64
5	.80
6	.96
7	1.12
8	1.28
9	1.44
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This pamphlet has been especially prepared for use by discussion groups. Its purpose is to present, in brief form, some of the more important facts on the current tax situation, and some of the viewpoints which are the basis of current programs for revision of tax policy. No statement contained herein should be taken as an official expression by the Department of Agriculture.

The following questions are discussed:

- How many kinds of taxes are there?
- Who pays taxes?
- Why have taxes?
- What limits taxes?
- How should a tax system be judged?
- What tax proposals particularly concern farmers today?
- For what purposes should tax money be used?
- What tax schedule would best fit current needs?

Copies of this pamphlet may be obtained free upon request addressed to the Extension Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C. Other pamphlets have been similarly prepared and are similarly obtainable.

SUBJECT-MATTER PAMPHLETS FOR THE 1936-37 SEASON

- DS-1 What Should Be the Farmers' Share in the National Income?
- DS-2 How Do Farm People Live in Comparison with City People?
- DS-3 Should Farm Ownership Be a Goal of Agricultural Policy?
- DS-4 Exports and Imports—How Do They Affect the Farmer?
- DS-5 Is Increased Efficiency in Farming Always a Good Thing?
- DS-6 What Should Farmers Aim to Accomplish Through Organization?
- DS-7 What Kind of Agricultural Policy Is Necessary to Save Our Soil?
- DS-8 What Part Should Farmers in Your County Take in Making National Agricultural Policy?

SUBJECT-MATTER PAMPHLETS FOR THE 1937-38 SEASON

- DS-9 Taxes: Who Pays, What For?
- DS-10 Rural Communities: What Do They Need Most?
- DS-11 Soil Conservation: Who Gains By It?
- DS-12 Co-ops: How Far Can They Go?
- DS-13 Farm Finance: What Is a Sound System?
- DS-14 Crop Insurance: Is It Practical?
- DS-15 Reciprocal Trade Agreements: Hurting or Helping the Country?
- DS-16 Farm Security: How Can Tenants Find It?

PAMPHLETS ON THE DISCUSSION METHOD

- D-3 What Is the Discussion Leader's Job?

United States Department of Agriculture

The Extension Service and the
Agricultural Adjustment Administration Cooperating
September 1937

TAXES: WHO PAYS, WHAT FOR?

When people hear the word taxes, the first taxes that come to mind are likely to be **property taxes**. Almost everybody will recall the line that forms in the courthouse at the office of the County Treasurer when taxes fall due.

On the other hand, the first taxes to come to mind might be **income taxes**, and how people spend a good many evenings before the 15th of March each year in the midst of a pile of check-books, receipted bills, ledgers and the like, filling out **personal income** tax returns—and work by day in their offices with similar figures on **corporate income** taxes.

HOW MANY KINDS OF TAXES ARE THERE?

Both general property taxes and income taxes fall due on specified dates, from one to four times a year. A good many other taxes are paid irregularly, every day or every few days, and are collected by people other than revenue collectors. The girl at the motion picture window collects an **amusement tax** at the same time that she takes in the price of admission. The man at the service station collects **gasoline taxes** as well as the price of gas. In 23 states and two large cities, the cash registers at all retail stores ring up a **sales tax** along with the price of the article bought. The corks of liquor bottles and the flaps of cigarette boxes are held down by **revenue stamps**. Automobiles don't get very far on the highway without **license plates**. The walls of the offices of doctors, dentists, druggists and certain merchants have **licenses** posted on them. Lawyers are similarly licensed; their offices contain records of **estates, inheritances, gifts**, and other **transfers of property**, subject to taxation. Employers include **payroll taxes** in their records. Importers find customs men at ports and frontier posts ready to apply **tariff rates** to their incoming shipments. Even this list is far from complete. No wonder people say there's nothing certain in this world but death and taxes!

GIFT TAX



MOTOR-VEHICLE TAX



CUSTOMS



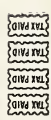
DEATH TAX



PAY-ROLL TAX



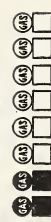
SALES TAX



TOBACCO TAX



GASOLINE TAX



LIQUOR TAX



MISCELLANEOUS TAXES



INCOME TAX:
CORPORATION AND PERSONAL



PROPERTY TAX



FEDERAL



STATE
(INCLUDING SHARES DISTRIBUTED TO LOCALITIES)



LOCAL



EACH FIGURE REPRESENTS 100 MILLION DOLLARS

SOURCES OF TAX REVENUE IN THE UNITED STATES, 1937

How many of the taxes just mentioned are paid in your community? What others are paid there?

WHO PAYS TAXES?

At first sight, the answer to this question seems easy. The people who hand over the cash or write out the checks pay them, of course. But do they? Or do the people who send in the money for some of these taxes collect it in turn from somebody else, so that the tax is shifted along the line?

For example, aren't rents usually set at rates to cover taxes and other expenses of landlords as well as to give them interest on their investment? Aren't some of the taxes on manufacturers, such as tobacco and liquor taxes, gasoline taxes, sales taxes, payroll taxes, likely to be passed forward to consumers in the form of higher retail prices? Or backward to producers—including farmers—in the form of lower prices for raw materials or lower wages for factory workers? Don't the customs duties that are levied under tariff laws on certain classes of foreign goods raise the prices paid in the home market by consumers of all goods of those classes?

In your opinion, what taxes in your community are finally paid by people other than those who hand the money over to the government?

WHY HAVE TAXES?

What is the purpose of all these different levies? In a self-governing country, people approve their tax system by their votes. What is it that American citizens want that makes them agree to pay so many taxes?

Two main purposes underlie most taxation:

1. To pay the cost of certain services which people believe the community should provide as a community rather than as individuals;
2. To control certain activities in the interest of the public welfare.

The primary purpose of the types of taxes that yield considerable sums of money is to raise revenue to meet local, state and national expenditures for:

The machinery of government: Legislatures, executive and administrative units, courts;

Defense: Army, navy, and police;

Education: Elementary schools, high schools, universities;
Public welfare: Roads; public health; relief.

How much money is raised in your local tax district for local purposes each year? Is the amount increasing? What services are provided out of public funds in your vicinity? Should some of them be discontinued? Should others be added?

The primary purpose of certain taxes, on the other hand, is less to raise revenue than to insure certain standards of performance or to discourage activities which are looked upon as detrimental to the general welfare. Certain customs rates are levied primarily to check or stop the importation of various types of goods; certain excise taxes are laid chiefly to reduce sales of the taxed product by raising its price. Certain licensing provisions are intended to insure the maintenance of standards of sanitation, labor, professional performance, or the like. Certain transfer and license taxes are framed to discourage various types of business structure and business activity.

In your opinion, what taxes now levied belong in the class of taxes where control is as important as revenue? When has taxation for control been applied to farm products?

WHAT LIMITS TAXES?

Is the sky the limit on taxation? Or is the power to tax subject to certain restrictions? If subject to limitations, what are they?

Political limitations.—The principle applied by many politicians in search of money to carry on government has been reduced to common speech in the slogan, "The most feathers for the least squawking." If taxes are to be productive, they obviously must be applied where there is money. This gives rise to two rival slogans. People who have very little money say taxes should be laid on those with more money—in other words, "Soak the rich!" People who have a good deal of money in turn issue the warning, "Don't kill the goose that lays the golden egg!" In other words, don't tax those who make money so severely that they cease to put forth the effort necessary to make it.

Nobody enjoys paying taxes—almost everybody believes that the best tax is the one the other fellow pays.

When people are willing to pay taxes, their willingness is usually due to one of two causes. Either they are not conscious that they are being taxed, as is the case with many people who pay indirect taxes, or, although they realize what their taxes are, they pay willingly because they approve of the uses made of tax money.

Resistance to taxation is likely to come from groups whose members disapprove of the uses made of tax funds, or believe that they themselves are being subjected to sudden, excessive, or arbitrary tax levies. Politicians framing tax schedules have to measure the effect of such resistance at the polls.

What instances can you cite of organized political resistance to taxation? What instances can you cite where people have been willing to pay increased taxes because they believed in the purposes for which the money was to be spent?

Economic limitations.—With government budgets at their present levels, the effect of the tax bill on the people's welfare is obviously important. The tax system of a country may either advance or retard its economic progress. Practically 10½ billion dollars are being raised through taxation by the Federal and State governments and more than 175,000 local government units with taxing powers. National cash income paid out for 1936 was 62.1 billion dollars. In other words about one dollar in six was earmarked by some government unit. These figures emphasize the importance of a sound tax system. They emphasize the need for examining taxes to see:

1. Who really pays them—on what economic basis does our present tax system rest?

2. How does paying taxes under our present system affect people's capacity to spend—is it limiting the market for consumers' goods so sharply that the economic machine cannot function properly?

3. How does paying taxes under our present system affect people's capacity to save—is it limiting the market for stocks, bonds, mortgages and other means of providing producers' capital so sharply that the economic machine can not function properly?

Constitutional limitations.—In the United States, the laying of taxes is subject to definite constitutional safeguards, particularly in respect to the clause that occurs in both the fifth and the fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution, specifying that no person shall be deprived of property "without due process of law."

Further constitutional restriction on the laying of taxes is contained in the provision of Article I of the Constitution, that direct taxes (except income taxes, authorized by the sixteenth Amendment) may be laid by the Federal Government only in proportion to the population of the several States.

The taxing powers of the States are likewise limited. The Federal Constitution prohibits the laying of import and export duties by States, and a number of State constitutions provide that local units shall not tax above a given rate.

What constitutional limitations on the laying of taxes are in force in your community? Have these been recently changed?

HOW SHOULD A TAX SYSTEM BE JUDGED?

Clearly, there are a good many factors to be taken into account in judging a tax system. If the main purpose of a certain tax is to raise revenue, the most obvious question to ask would seem to be: How much revenue does it produce? Are there other taxes which would produce more?

If a further purpose of certain taxes is to exercise control, an appropriate question would seem to be: Are they in fact operating as control measures? Are there other taxes which would be more effective?

But people ask a great many other questions when they are judging tax systems. They advance various principles which they think should be considered in addition to the questions of productivity and effective control.

Many people insist that in a democratic country justice demands that the citizens share the tax burden in proportion to their **capacity to pay**, so that the cost of community

services may be equitably borne without falling more heavily on some members of the community than on others. They point to the graduated income tax, the rate of which increases as income increases, as an example of the best type of tax legislation; they point to a sales tax on necessities—a tax which some people have called “an upside down income tax”—as an example of the worst, because poor people spend a very large share of their income for necessities.

Another principle of taxation is that many of the services rendered by the government should be paid for by the users who **benefit** by the service rendered. According to this principle, automobile license fees and gas taxes are very satisfactory ways of paying for the public highways, and payroll taxes are similarly suitable for financing contributory old-age benefits. This principle usually is applied only to cases where the direct benefit to the individual seems greater than the general benefit to the community. For example, while most people think it is all right to have gas taxes to pay for roads in proportion to use, few would say that only families with children in school should pay school taxes.

A further principle of taxation which some people are eager to apply and others active to resist is that of using taxation for the **redistribution of wealth and income**. Those in favor, say that corporations have found ways of keeping big profits in the hands of just a few people, and ways of accumulating and hiding wealth which individual farmers or home owners cannot use. Those against, insist that a country where the income of a part of the people was used to support others who were shiftless and lazy just could not last.

Still another principle is advanced by the technicians whose job it is to make tax systems work. They want taxes to be considered with an eye to **simplicity of administration**. They point out that a tax which seems perfect from every other standpoint may still be an undesirable tax if it costs too much to collect or if the red tape of collections is so much bother that the persons or firms taxed become resentful.

What additional principles do you think should be kept in mind when judging a tax system? Do you regard those listed as sound? Why?

WHAT TAX PROPOSALS PARTICULARLY CONCERN FARMERS TODAY?

Relative Importance of Income and Property Taxes.—In recent years the general property tax, which originally was a tax on all property, has in most places become chiefly a tax on real property. You can't hide a farm in the closet, or cart it around from one State to another. Intangibles, such as stocks and bonds and mortgages, are difficult to reach with a general property tax. Income taxes have been increasingly adopted to reach wealth which otherwise might not contribute to the expenses of government. What do you think of the following statement:

"Furthermore, examination shows the 'ability' argument for the general property tax to be based on a false premise—namely, that individuals receive income in proportion to their property holdings. Contrast the circumstances of many professional and salaried men of today whose incomes run into tens, even hundreds of thousands of dollars, with the situation of many farmers who are 'land poor'—who own hundreds of acres of land but are barely able to wring a scanty livelihood from them. . . .

"In a community where there are no sharp inequalities in wealth and where the mass of property is of a tangible, readily assessable character, the worst injustices of the general property tax do not develop. Tinkering and patching can soften such abuses as do arise. **Given a good administration, the general property tax may well prove a satisfactory method of taxation in states of an essentially agricultural character.** As a community becomes more industrialized, as the distribution of wealth and income diverges, and as the intangible forms of property values increase in importance, the maladjustments of a general property tax becomes more glaring. **It is an open question whether the injustices of the general property tax in industrial states do not outweigh its revenue possibilities.**"—American Public Finance and Taxation, W. J. Schultz, pp. 426-428.

What were the chief sources of income of your State and local governments last year? Do you think your State and local budgets could be more easily and equitably financed if more reliance were placed on income taxes and less on property taxes? If so, should the law provide for the taxation of income which farmers received in kind, such as

"rent" in the form of use of farm houses, and "income" in the form of produce raised and consumed on the farm?

Homestead exemptions.—What do you think of this general conclusion on homestead exemptions, reached by a research group whose report was recently issued:

"Exemptions under the property tax have been touched on above. It may be added, however, that from the point of view of a just distribution of the tax burden we can see no merit in the homestead exemptions recently adopted in Florida and several other states. The most obvious injustice in such exemptions is that they discriminate against the tenant, who must bear in his rent at least part of the real estate tax burden on his dwelling, and favor the person who happens to be able and willing to own his home."—Facing the Tax Problem, 20th Century Fund, Inc., p. 412.

Are homestead exemptions in effect in your State?

Zoning of agricultural land.—Zoning of agricultural land is not primarily a tax measure. But one of its main purposes is to diminish the cost of providing schools, roads, and other services by keeping people who move into sparsely settled agricultural areas from scattering themselves so far and wide that the cost of roads and schools is excessive. Do you approve of zoning as thus defined:

"In general, however, zoning will have for its purpose either or both of the following:

1. Control and suppression of uses of land or buildings which have a ruinous effect on established property values in the immediate vicinity.
2. Control or suppression of uses of land or buildings which would result in wasteful expenditure of the tax moneys paid by other taxpayers in the same taxing unit . . .

"In a growing state, and in a growing community, zoning offers an opportunity to control or prevent uses either harmful to property values or burdensome to other taxpayers."—Making the Best Use of Wisconsin Land Through Zoning, Extension Service, College of Agriculture, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wis.

Are zoning regulations in effect in your State?

Capitalization of Land Taxes.—Attention is frequently called to the fact that when land changes hands, the seller is likely to assume the burden of such taxes as can be reasonably anticipated, in the form of selling values lower than would have been obtainable if future taxes were not figured in. That is, where taxes are high in relation to taxes in other areas, the buyer is not willing to pay as much

for the land. In other words, the state acquires an interest in the property at the expense of the old owners.

In your community, what are the answers to the questions asked in the following quotation:

"If the tax on land has been widely capitalized, the implications for practical action in the direction of relief to real estate are of extreme importance. If the extent of that capitalization could be even approximately determined a standard would be provided below which it would seem to be undesirable to reduce the prevailing rates of the land tax. Have purchases and sales of land taken place in recent years in the presence of an expectation of a given level of tax rates? On what scale have transfers been made since the establishment of the present level of tax rates? To what extent is the land still in the possession of those who owned it when the present rates became established and to what extent has it passed into the hands of new owners?"—Report of the New York State Commission for the Revision of the Tax Laws. Legislative Document (1932) No. 77.

Can you name instances of land-tax capitalization in recent sales in your neighborhood?

Taxation as an aid in obtaining agricultural adjustment.—Taxation has been used in connection with agricultural policies in recent years as part of the old AAA programs and the Bankhead (Cotton) and Kerr-Smith (Tobacco) Acts. The processing taxes were devised as revenue measures providing money for benefit payments to make possible agricultural adjustment programs. The Bankhead and Kerr-Smith taxes were laid for the purpose of control. Neither type of tax is now in operation. Here are two quotations on the subject of the use of the tax power in relation to agriculture:

"The absolute power to lay taxes includes the power in every form in which it may be used, and for every purpose to which the legislature may choose to apply it. This results from the very nature of such an unrestricted power. A fortiori it might be applied by Congress to purposes for which nations have been accustomed to apply it. Now, nothing is more clear, from the history of commercial nations, than the fact that the taxing power is often, very often, applied for other purposes than revenue. It is often applied as a regulation of commerce. It is often applied as a virtual prohibition upon the importation of particular articles for the encouragement and protection of domestic products and industry; for the support of agriculture, commerce, and manufactures; for retaliation upon foreign monopolies and injurious restrictions; for mere purposes of state policy and domestic economy; sometimes to banish a noxious article of consumption; sometimes as a bounty upon an infant manufacture or agricultural product; sometimes as a temporary restraint of trade; sometimes as a suppression of particular employments; sometimes as a prerogative power to de-

stroy competition, and secure a monopoly to the government."—Commentaries on the Constitution, Joseph Story, 5th ed., Vol. 1, section 965:

The following is an extract from the opinion of Chief Justice Taft in *Hill v. Wallace*, 259 U. S. 44, at page 66:

"It is impossible to escape the conviction, from a full reading of this law, that it was enacted for the purpose of regulating the conduct of business of boards of trade through supervision of the Secretary of Agriculture and the use of an administrative tribunal consisting of that Secretary, the Secretary of Commerce, and the Attorney General. Indeed, the title of the act recites that one of its purposes is the regulation of boards of trade . . . The manifest purpose of the tax is to compel boards of trade to comply with regulations, many of which can have no relevancy to the collection of the tax at all . . . The act is in essence and on its face a complete regulation of boards of trade, with a penalty of 20 cents a bushel on all 'futures' to coerce boards of trade and their members into compliance. When this purpose is declared in the title to the bill, and is so clear from the effect of the provisions of the bill itself, it leaves no ground upon which the provisions we have been considering can be sustained as a valid exercise of the taxing power. The elaborate machinery for hearings by the Secretary of Agriculture and by the commission of violations of these regulations, with the withdrawal by the commission of the designation of the board as a contract market, and of complaints against persons who violate the act or such regulations, and the imposition upon them of the penalty of requiring all boards of trade to refuse to permit them the usual privileges, only confirm this view."

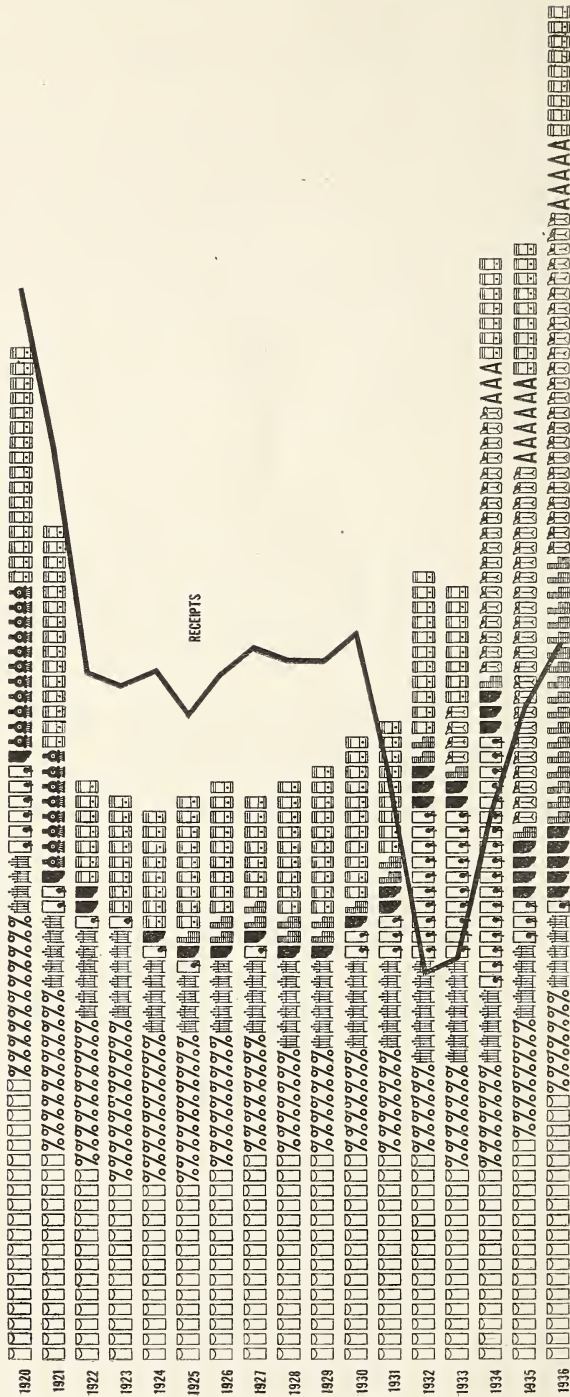
What do you think of the general principle of using the tax power to improve the agricultural situation?

FOR WHAT PURPOSES SHOULD TAX MONEY BE USED?

Most people agree upon the necessity of certain minimum expenditures on the part of government for schools, roads, defense, and the like. But they often disagree as to how much should be spent for these services, and as to what other services should be provided chiefly or wholly at public expense.

For example, to what extent should social security benefits be provided by the government? To what extent should health services be provided by the government? To what extent should the government be concerned with the ups and downs of business? Should it assume certain extraordinary powers comparable to war powers during depressions, and then withdraw from the economic field as conditions improve? Or should the government act as a balance wheel in both good and bad times? Or should

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURES AND RECEIPTS, 1920-1936



LEGEND OF EXPENDITURES

EACH FIGURE REPRESENTS APPROXIMATELY 100 MILLION DOLLARS

- ☐ PAY ROLLS, INCLUDING POST OFFICE
- % INTEREST ON PUBLIC DEBT
- ☐ PENSIONS, ETC.
- ☐ PURCHASE OF RECOVERABLE ASSETS
- ☐ GRANTS TO STATES
- ☐ RAILROAD ADMINISTRATION
- ☐ VETERANS' BONUS
- ☐ RELIEF
- A AAA
- ☐ MISCELLANEOUS

it assume a considerable measure of control and direction of economic activities? Do average citizens need more help through government now than a hundred years ago?

WHAT TAX SCHEDULE WOULD BEST FIT CURRENT NEEDS?

Federal, State and local governments are spending about $17\frac{1}{3}$ billions a year at present. About $1\frac{3}{4}$ billions of this amount is being raised through income-producing activities; about $10\frac{1}{2}$ billions through taxes; the remainder through borrowing.

What proposals would you make with regard to these budgets? What items do you regard as most important and how much money should be allowed for each of them?

In your opinion, where are the biggest leaks in our tax expenditures? How can we find out whether our taxes are spent efficiently?

Are you familiar with the various proposals that have recently been made with regard to government reorganization, Federal, State and local? How would they affect the tax system and the tax bill?

Which of the taxes mentioned at the beginning of this pamphlet would you include in an ideal tax schedule? In what proportion would you rely on them?

MORE ABOUT TAXES

In the preceding pages, the farm tax problem has been treated as part of the national tax problem. Groups of farmers who are discussing taxes, however, will doubtless wish to consider in detail the particular taxes that they pay. A series of useful charts on this subject is contained in "A Graphic Summary of Farm Taxation," U. S. Department of Agriculture, Misc. Publication No. 262, on sale at \$0.05, by the Superintendent of Documents, Washington, D. C. Figure 1 shows the sources of the tax dollar paid by farmers; Figure 2, the variations since 1913 in gross farm income, farm real estate value per acre, and tax per acre; Figures 13 and 14, uses of farm-property taxes in various states; Figure 15, farm gasoline taxes and automobile licenses per farm; Figures 23 and 24, rural real estate tax delinquency. 1928-32.

Publications presenting State-wide facts and figures on such subjects as: farm income and taxes; tax trends; sales valuation and assessed valuation; rural tax delinquency; government costs and taxes; taxation and ability to pay; comparative tax burdens of farm and city, are available from the Agricultural Experiment Stations and State Agricultural Colleges of most States. Commissions on reorganization of State and local governments have made reports in many States.

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